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SENSITIVE

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FOR OES/S Nancy Carter-Foster

ALSO FOR National Highway Transportation Safety Administration  
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: FRANCE SUPPORTS MEASURES AGAINST DISTRACTED DRIVING

REF: State 6703

¶1. Summary: In a February 3 meeting with the Ambassador, French Junior Minister for Transportation Dominique Bussereau praised recent USG efforts on distracted driving. Bussereau described ongoing GOF efforts to reduce road deaths from 7,000 a few years ago to 3,000 by 2012 through enforcing speed limits with radar and cameras and promoting safe driving habits through television spots on distracted driving. In separate meetings, working-level officials from both the Environment and Health Ministries told ESTH Counselor that in 2003 France banned hand-held cell phone use and texting in moving cars, and provided answers to reftel questions. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On February 3 French State Secretary for Transportation Dominique Bussereau praised recent USG efforts to ban text messaging and the use of electronic devices while driving. Bussereau recalled to Ambassador Rivkin that he participated in talks on these issues at the Moscow ministerial conference on Global Road Safety in November 2009 and confirmed France's participation at the upcoming March UNGA discussion on road safety. In 2003, France banned text messaging and the use of electronic devices while driving (although it has a tolerance policy concerning the use of cell phones with a "hands-free holder.")

¶3. (SBU) Bussereau recommended that the upcoming U.S. Department of Transportation delegation meet with Michele Merli, Interagency Delegate for Road Safety. Each month Merli, Environment Minister Borloo, and Bussereau jointly present statistics on road safety. Bussereau highlighted the GOF's ongoing and long-term commitment to achieving sustainable improvements in road safety. Prime Minister Fillon will announce on February 18 new measures designed to bolster further road safety and prevent deaths, injuries, and property damage resulting from unsafe traffic behavior. Bussereau reiterated the GOF's goal to reduce the yearly traffic mortality rate to 3,000 by 2012 (currently at 4,000, down from 7,000 several years ago).

¶4. (SBU) In earlier meetings with the ESTH Counselor, Joel Valmain, advisor for international affairs and the interministerial delegate for road safety at the Ministry of Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development, and Oceans (MEEDDM), and Charles Saout, Deputy Head for Environment and Food Risk Prevention, MEEDDM, confirmed that France shares the concerns of the U.S. about the dangers of distracted driving and that France would work closely with Secretary LaHood on this issue.

¶5. (U) Specific Answer to reftel questions:

-- Existing laws banning texting or cell phone use: In 2003, France banned hand-held cell phone use in cars as a distraction to driving.

This includes both talking and texting while driving. (Embassy note: Enforcement of this ban is lax to non-existent.)

-- Available data regarding crashes due to distracted driving:

Explicit data regarding fatalities, injuries and crashes directly related to distracted driving is not available due to the difficulty in determining the exact cause of the accident, which might involve multiple factors (i.e., a drunk driver who is speeding while

texting). The Ministry of Health's assessment is that the risk drivers take when using a cell phone while driving is five times greater than those who do not, and seven percent of accidents could be prevented if drivers did not use their cell phones.

-- Nationwide education campaigns against distracted driving:

France offers multiple online educational campaigns regarding the dangers and risks taken while driving. This includes the use of cell phones while driving. Audio and visual examples show the associated consequences of distracted driving including resulting accidents ([www.securite-routiere.gouv.fr](http://www.securite-routiere.gouv.fr)). The GOF urges drivers not to use a cell phone at all when driving, though traffic infractions are only issued if one is holding a device. Pamphlets are available to foreign visitors in English informing them of traffic rules and regulations while driving in France.

-- The effectiveness of efforts to reduce distracted driving:

France has been very proactive and effective in reducing accident fatalities and injuries by enforcing speed restrictions on drivers in recent years. With the increased implementation of traffic cameras and radar and driver tickets issued, France has lowered the number of car accident deaths from 7,000 to 4,000 in the recent years. They hope to bring the number down to 3,000 by 2012.

-- Prevalence of text messaging and cell phone use: Recent data from France reports that approximately 2 percent of public drivers, 2.5 percent of small commercial vehicle drivers, and about 4-5 percent of truck drivers use their cellular phones while driving (talking and texting is not distinguished). In 2007, there were an estimated 19 billion text messages sent nationwide with numbers increasing each year.

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